

Soundtrack of a revolution

'Hip Hop: The Songs That Shook America' airs on AMC

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TV Media

Music is much more than mere entertainment. From the rebellious rock 'n' roll era of the 1950s to the political protest songs of the 1960s and beyond, music has often been reflective of cultural revolution, a sign of the times, if you will. This fall, a new series takes an in-depth look at the history and impact of today's dominant music genre: hip-hop.

Some of the biggest stars of the hip-hop era discuss how the genre has given a voice to a new generation in the new docuseries "Hip Hop: The Songs That Shook America," premiering Sunday, Oct. 13, on AMC. Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson and Tariq "Black Thought" Trotter of the Philadelphia-based hip-hop group The Roots serve as executive producers for the series, which takes a look at a different trailblazing song in each episode.

The six-episode series explores the rise of hip-hop, from its humble and sometimes controversial beginnings to its impact on mainstream American culture today. Recording artists walk viewers through the creation of some of the most influential songs of the hip-hop era.

Questlove explained the need for a serious look at the art of hip-hop in a September article on latimes.com.

"Hip-hop was seen as a low-level art form, or not even seen as actual art," Questlove said. "People now see there's value in hip-hop, but I feel like that's based on the millions of dollars it's generated. Like its value is like that of junk bonds or a Baltic Avenue Monopoly property. A money generator. But there's a different story that needed to be told."

The show's debut episode takes a look at Kanye West's "Jesus Walks," a controversial Christian rap song that challenged religion. While many people likely know West as the husband of reality TV star Kim Kardashian,

early archival footage of the recording artist explores how he managed to meld rap, gospel and spiritual lyrics in the 2004 hit.

Next, the series features Kendrick Lamar's 2015 release "Alright," which became an anthem of hope during the early days of the BlackLivesMatter movement. Rapper Pharrell Williams, the song's co-producer, talked about the importance of tracing hip-hop's history in a teaser for "Hip Hop: The Songs That Shook America" posted on YouTube this past May.

"If we want people to really respect what rap music is, you've got to understand its origin," Williams said. He went on to explain: "Yeah, people have a chip on their shoulder. Yeah, people are upset. And that's the kind of anger that you're hearing in this music."

AMC's docuseries then jumps back in time, all the way to 1984, to profile Run-DMC's pioneering release "Rock Box." The song mixed electric guitar riffs with hip-hop beats, tearing down barriers not only between the two music styles but also between race and class in American media.

Hip-hop duo OutKast broke new ground with the hit "Elevators" in 1996, and "Hip Hop: The Songs That Shook America" explores how the song redefined the cultural and geographical boundaries of rap.

The show then examines the impact of the 1987 song "The Bridge" by MC Shan and Marley Marl. Intended to foster community pride, the release ignited one of hip-hop's most famous rap battles between Marl and KRS-One from Boogie Down Productions.

Queen Latifah herself represents the female perspective in AMC's "Hip Hop." Her 1989 debut album "All Hail the Queen" featured the song "Ladies First," a feminist anthem that became a huge hit and challenged misogyny in hip-hop at the time.



Tariq "Black Thought" Trotter in "Hip Hop: The Songs That Shook America"

These six songs offer TV viewers a sampling of hip-hop's vast and varied history, something executive producers Quest Love and Black Thought know a lot about. As founding members of eclectic hip-hop group The Roots, which was formed in 1987, they're well versed in the genre. Known for using live musical instruments to produce their unique hip-hop groove, The Roots rose through the ranks of the music industry and currently serve as the house

band for "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon." They may have achieved mainstream success, but they were part of the early days of the hip-hop revolution, making them well suited to bring the story of hip-hop to television.

Questlove and Black Thought work alongside fellow executive producers Alex Gibney ("Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room," 2005), Shawn Gee ("SoundClash," 2014), Stacey

Offman ("The Inventor: Out for Blood in Silicon Valley," 2019), Richard Perello ("Club Dread," 2004) and rookie Shea Serrano. "Hip Hop: The Songs That Shook America" was co-directed by journalist-turned-filmmaker Erik Parker ("L.A. Burning") and Emmy-nominated director One9 ("Nas: Time Is Illmatic," 2014).

With some of the genre's most influential voices on-screen and behind the scenes

including Big Boi, Rev Run, Darryl McDaniels and more, AMC's new docuseries promises an insider's look at hip-hop and its impact on modern culture as it explores how six groundbreaking songs gave a voice to a largely unheard population. Find out how hip-hop music has inspired and influenced history in "Hip Hop: The Songs That Shook America," premiering Sunday, Oct. 13, on AMC.